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ABSTRACT

Research has indicated that female models are important for female college students in their career decisions. To examine the effect of female role models on the career choices of college females, 57 freshmen students were provided with role models through interaction with female faculty advisers, and through exposure to female career women in a course on career exploration. A control group (N=34) did not receive the interaction experiences. After the first and fourth years of college, subjects completed the Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory, the Attitudes Toward Women Scale, the Life Style Index, and the Occupational Status Inventory. Data were also collected on career goals and influential persons during their college years. An analysis of the results (response rate of 59%) showed significant increases in scores on all measures for both groups, with no signficant differences between the two groups. Approximately 40% of the students made major changes in their career goals. Some were still undecided at the end of four years. When asked who was most influential in their career choices, students named fathers almost as often as mothers. Students in the treatment group were more likely than those in the control group to name females as role models. The findings suggest that although the subjects underwent attitudinal changes in their college years, none of the changes could be attributed to the intervention, but rather to a normal developmental process. (BL)

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CHANGES IN FEMALE CAREER GOALS AND ATTITUDES DURING COLLEGE

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Changes in female career goals and attitudes during college

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Since women now compose half of the labor market and are expected to continue to be a major component, the variables which affect women's career choices are of considerable interest. Studies, such as the one by Rossi (1965), have indicated that women in non-traditional careers are more likely to have mothers who are professional, highly educated, and working outside the home than women in traditional careers. This phenomenon has been interpreted as the role modeling influence of the mother. Douvan (1976) also pointed out that a crucial older woman model is prominent in the biographies of a number of women successful in politics and academia.

Basow and Howe (1980) in examining the effects of role models on both males and females conclude that female models are particularly important for female college students in their career decisions.

Almquist and Angrist (1971), in discussing the function of role models, suggest that they function as a reference group, setting norms and values providing recognition for achievements, and orienting certain behaviors. Bell (1970) points out that role modeling includes two processes, interaction and identification.

During the 1978-79 academic year a random sample of incoming freshmen women were asked to participate in a yearlong project examining the effect of female role models on career choices. Role models were provided for the freshman women in two ways--through interaction with female faculty advisors and through exposure to female career women in the course on career exploration. At the end of the project year data were gathered on the women in the project and a control group of freshmen women. There were significant changes in attitudes toward women and self-esteem for the treatment group but not the control group. However, it was too soon to determine the effect of the project on career choices.

Some studies have shown that projects such as this often have a delayed effect (Brush, 1978). Moreover, changes in attitude and differences in career choices are not expected to be evident immediately after intervention since these are long-term processes. Therefore, the gathering of longitudinal data is essential for examining the impact of any such program.

Subjects

Subjects were the 91 participants in the original career exploration project. 57 composed the treatment group and 34 had been in the control group.

Procedure

In the summer following their fourth year in college, subjects were asked to fill out the same attitude surveys they completed during their freshmen year. These included the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. Attitudes toward Women Scale, Life Style Index, and Occupational Status Inventory. The subjects were also asked about current career goals and influential persons during their college years.

Results

Responses were received from 55 subjects (59% return rate).

Analyses of variance indicated significant increases in scores on all measures for both groups with no significant differences between the two groups. Approximately 40% of the students made major changes in their career goals. Some were still undecided at the end of four years. There was an increase in the percentage who wanted to continue their education. 84% indicated they intended to do so. (See Table 1.)

While the percentage of students who preferred to work part-time while they had families was roughly the same, the percentage who preferred to work full-time when they had families increased from 24% to 35%. (See Table 2.)

When asked who was most influential in their career choices, students named their fathers almost as often as mothers. Students in the treatment group were more likely to name females as role models than those in the control group. (See Table 3).

Discussion

During their years in College, the subjects increased in self-esteem, underwent some attitude changes (see Tables 4,5,6) and clarified or shifted career goals. However, none of these changes can be attributed to the intervention strategy used their freshman year. Rather, the changes seem to be the result of the normal developmental process.

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Table 1

Career Goals

Career Shifts During College	(%)
Major Change	38
Minor Change	17
No Change	23
Made choice during college	15
Still undecided at graduation	7

Plan to continue education after graduation	At Entrance (%)	At Graduation (%)
Graduate school	57.1	61.1
Professional school	6.1	9.3
Other training	6.1	13.0
Will not continue	30.6	16.7

Table 2

Life-Style

Assume married with children and husband earns enough. Under these conditions, which would you prefer.

	At Entrance (%)	At Graduation (%)
1. To participate in clubs or volunteer work	4.1	0.0
2. To spend time on hobbies, sports, etc.	8.2	5.6
3. To work part-time	44.9	48.1
4. To work full-time	24.5	35.2
5. To concentrate on home and family	10.2	5.6
6. Other	12.2	5.6

Fifteen years from now, would you like to be

1. A housewife with no children	0.0	0.0
2. A housewife with one or more children.	18.0	9.4
3. An unmarried career woman	6.0	0.0
4. A married career woman without children.	4.0	7.5
5. A married career woman with children	72.0	77.4
6. Other	0.0	5.2

Table 3

Role Models

During your college years, who do you think influenced you most in making your career choice?

	(%)*
1. Mother	19
2. Father	15
3. Both	9
4. Male Adult	28
5. Female Adult	17
6. No one or self	21

* Some respondents gave more than one answer.

Table 4

Self Esteem Scale
(Selected Items)

	At Entrance Agree (%)	At Graduation Agree (%)
1. I can make up my mind without too much trouble.	64	76
2. I give in very easily.	38	33
3. Other people usually follow my ideas.	78	97
4. I have a low opinion of myself.	18	13
5. If I have something to say, I usually say it.	75	82
6. I often get discouraged at what I am doing.	25	13
7. I can't be depended on.	2	2

Table 6

Occupational Status of Women
(Selected Items)

	At Entrance Agree (%)	At Graduation Agree (%)
1. No man really prefers a female boss.	82	69
2. Women need more alternatives for employment than are currently available to them.	90	85
3. Complete equality for women is unrealistic.	39	46
4. Working women feel guilty about being away from their homes and children.	62	57
5. In order to succeed in a field traditionally considered a man's domain, women must surpass men in ambition and intelligence.	67	83
6. Men find it difficult to marry women who have more education than they do.	71	68

Table 5

Attitudes Toward Women
(Selected Items)

	At Entrance Agree (%)	At Graduation Agree (%)
1. Swearing and obscenity are repulsive in the speech of a woman than a man.	62	49
2. Women should take increasing responsibility for leadership in solving intellectual and social problems of the day.	91	96
3. A woman should be as free as a man to propose marriage.	83	71
4. Women earning as much as their dates should share expenses when they go out together.	81	82
5. A woman should not expect to go to exactly the same places or have quite the same freedom of action as men.	25	11
6. The modern girl is entitled to the same freedom from regulation and control that is given to the modern boy.	85	95